

VZCZCXYZ0000
PP RUEHWEB

DE RUEHRH #6038 2110715
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 300715Z JUL 06
FM AMEMBASSY RIYADH
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 0117
INFO RUEHJI/AMCONSUL JEDDAH 7522

C O N F I D E N T I A L RIYADH 006038

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 07/30/2016
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PINR](#) [KISL](#) [SA](#)
SUBJECT: CONSERVATIVE SAUDI CLERICS DEBATE SUPPORT FOR
HIZBALLAH

Classified By: Deputy Chief of Mission Michael Gfoeller
for reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

1. (C) SUMMARY: Last week, three revered Wahhabi sheikhs issued advisory opinions in their own capacity on the question of support for Hizballah. On July 17, prominent Wahhabi Sheikh Abdullah bin Jabreen issued an advisory opinion, reported as a fatwa declaring it impermissible for Muslims to support Hizballah in any manner, including through prayers. On July 22, however, another prominent conservative religious scholar Salman al-Oudah issued an advisory opinion, also reported as a fatwa, that emphasized the need for Shi'a and Sunni to unite against Israeli aggression. This sentiment was echoed on July 25 when Sheikh Nasir al-Omar, a conservative cleric known for his stance against Hizballah, issued a long commentary on a conservative website discussing the need to unite against Zionist aggression. He also strongly criticized the role of the U.S. government in Lebanon, Palestine and Iraq. These statements reflect the ongoing debate in Saudi society about whether or not to support Hizballah in its confrontation with Israel. END SUMMARY.

2. (C) On July 17, Sheikh Abdullah bin Jabreen published a religious opinion against Hizballah on the conservative, Wahhabi website www.islamlight.net. His opinion, published independently and not in an official capacity, was in response to the questions: "Is it permissible to support Hizballah? Is it permissible to join under their leadership? Is it permissible to pray for them to be victorious? What is your advice for Sunnis fooled by them?" To these questions, bin Jabreen answered: "It is not permissible to support this Shi'a faction, or to join under their leadership, or to pray for their victory. We advise the Sunnis to be alienated from them and to desert those who join them and explain their enmity to Islam and Muslims and the harm they caused for the Sunnis in the past and present." He further stated that the Shi'a have always been the enemies of the Sunnis and therefore exhibiting any support for them is equivalent to being one of them. (Bio Note: Bin Jabreen, an outspoken, prominent Wahhabi in Saudi Arabia, is a professor at Imam University and a member of the Permanent Commission for Religious Fatwa, Call and Guidance. End Bio Note.)

3. (C) On July 22, conservative Saudi religious scholar Salman al-Oudah issued an advisory opinion during an interview on the Lebanese television network MBC regarding Hizballah. He acknowledged the irreconcilable religious differences between the Shi'a and Sunni, but stated that "we should postpone our arguments at the time and be united against Israeli aggression." This statement was a complete change in tenor for al-Oudah, as he is well-known for his fatwas against Shi'a, which include bans on marriage between the two sects. (Bio Note: Al-Oudah is the supervisor of the extremist website Islam Today and is the author of many fatwas against the Shi'a. End Bio Note.)

14. (C) On July 25, conservative Sheikh Nasir al-Omar published a lengthy commentary on his website www.almoslim.net on the goals and political ties of Hizballah. This commentary was published one week following his reissuance of a 2005 fatwa against Hizballah, and it replaced the fatwa online. The commentary covers the issues of Palestine, Lebanon, and Iraq, but focuses its attention on the Zionist aggression against Lebanon and the links between the "Zionist enemy" and the United States. In his statement he makes links between the U.S. and Iran, criticizing the U.S. for collaborating with the Shi'a in the conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq. Despite these criticisms and his history of issuing fatwas against Hizballah, he states that, "There is no question about the need to support the beleaguered and oppressed people in Palestine and Lebanon, send all possible relief aid to them, and alleviate their ordeal by all forms of material and moral assistance." He further states, "A Muslim is every other Muslim's brother. He does not let him down or hand him over to the enemy."

15. (C) COMMENT: The shift in tone among the successive fatwas should not suggest a diminution of long-standing Saudi Sunni hostility toward the Shi'a. Rather, the statements reflect increasing anger among Saudi clerics and the public alike over the casualties and destruction in Lebanon. The SAG has responded to public unhappiness with increasing criticism of Israel, but not with praise for Hizballah. Saudi leaders will likely tolerate statements that are critical of Israel and call for Muslim unity in the face of Israeli aggression so long as the statements do not directly praise Hizballah or directly criticize the Saudi government.
END COMMENT.
OBERWETTER